

ALBERTA REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIA

2003 ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six Regional Professional Development Consortia were established in Alberta in 1995 to provide professional development services for the kindergarten to grade twelve educational sector. In 2000, the Deputy Minister identified the need for an assessment of the Consortia. The major goals for this assessment were identified as follows:

1. To determine how well the primary purposes identified for the Consortia in 1995 have been achieved;
2. To determine whether the Consortia model continues to be effective;
3. To make recommendations concerning the future role of the Consortia; and
4. To ensure that the accountability process measures and reports the degree to which stakeholders needs are met.

A two-phase assessment was conducted. Phase One examined various reports and planning documents produced by the Consortia; while Phase Two involved a consultation with stakeholders, using surveys, focus groups and submissions from stakeholder organizations. During the course of the assessment, two significant circumstances occurred that required consideration before completion of the assessment process: completion of the School Council Review, and most significantly, publication of the report of Alberta's Commission On Learning.

An interim report produced after Phase One of the assessment identified the desirability for Consortia to work together to develop a common accountability framework and a common set of performance measures. Consortia Executive Directors are working collaboratively with Alberta Education's System Improvement and Reporting Division to this end.

The consultation with stakeholders revealed general strong support for the work of the Consortia. The Consortia purposes identified in 1995 were generally found to be relevant, although some need for adjustments was identified. Similarly, the Consortia model had strong support, with some opportunities for improvement being identified.

The following recommendations are based on feedback received during the Consortia assessment. The recommendations are organized around the three main purposes of the assessment: to validate the purposes of the Consortia; to review the model of the Consortia; and to review the adequacy of accountability requirements of the Consortia.

PURPOSES OF THE CONSORTIA

Recommendation 1: The 1995 purpose statement should be updated to reflect the future directions for the Consortia identified through the consultation process. Specifically the six original purposes should be replaced with the broad statement of purpose below and six supporting Consortia goals:

PROPOSED PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDG) are dedicated to promoting student learning and achievement; school improvement; and parental engagement in the educational process, through the provision of effective professional development* services, at the local, regional and provincial levels.

PROPOSED CONSORTIA GOALS

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia will:

1. **Facilitate** professional development which supports the effective implementation of:
 - The Alberta Education business plan;
 - Jurisdiction and school education plans; and
 - School Council priorities.
2. **Facilitate** professional development which supports effective implementation of curricula, including instruction, assessment and student learning outcomes.
3. **Assist** stakeholders through coordinating, brokering, and acting as a referral center to facilitate stakeholder access to professional development resources.
4. **Deliver** professional development in response to needs identified by stakeholders.
5. **Promote and support** the development of professional development leadership capacity.
6. **Provide** all stakeholders with access to professional development at a reasonable cost.

* "Professional development" is here intended to refer to knowledge and skill development for all those who work with children to promote learning and achievement, including parents.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The specification of goals for the Consortia is consistent with the accountability frameworks used by other public entities (such as school jurisdictions) in the learning system.
- The adoption of common goals will facilitate ongoing collaboration and accountability by the Consortia.
- The recommended goals reflect the input received from stakeholders during the Consortia assessment.

CONSORTIA MODEL

Recommendation 2: A commitment of infrastructure funding (i.e. the salary and administrative expenses related to office of the Executive Director) should continue to be made on an ongoing basis.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The ability of Consortia Executive Directors and Consortia Boards to engage in long term planning will be enhanced if they have an indication that infrastructure funding will continue to be provided on an ongoing basis.
- Regular program offerings would continue to be provided on a fee-for-service basis. This approach has been well received, with stakeholders generally agreeing that Consortia PD is reasonably priced.
- In addition, from time-to-time Alberta Education may provide supplemental funding to facilitate PD related to government initiatives and priorities, such as significant curriculum revisions.

Recommendation 3: Each Consortium should strive to have all key stakeholder groups represented on the Consortium Board, including the addition of a non-certificated staff representative.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Broad stakeholder representation on the Consortia Boards is seen as a current strength of the Consortia model. However, consultations with school support staff indicate that they feel under-served by the Consortia, and that communications from the Consortia do not always reach them.
- The AHSCA has a seat on each Consortium's Board; however, they have not always been able to provide a representative to serve. In those instances when the AHSCA is unable to provide a Board representative, the Consortia should attempt to have a local School Council Chair or parent serve on the Board so that parents are ensured a voice at the Consortium Board level.

Recommendation 4: Basic Learning should continue to strengthen collaboration with the Consortia to ensure effective coordination, alignment and planning of PD.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Having Basic Learning staff assigned to work directly with the Consortia to facilitate planning and coordination has been found to be an effective part of the existing operational model.
- Having zone managers serve as ex-officio members of the Consortia Boards helps strengthen the link between the Consortia, the jurisdictions and Alberta Education.

ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Recommendation 5: The Consortia Executive Directors should continue to work with System Improvement and Reporting (SIR) and the School Improvement Branch to develop and implement a standardized accountability framework.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The current cost-recovery model is seen as providing a high level of accountability for the Consortia. However, it is recognized that adoption of a common accountability structure would enhance planning and communication of results.
- An accountability framework consisting of a vision and mission statements, goals, outcomes, performance measures and targets are now a standard component of results reporting by public entities. Such a framework would include a number of elements consistent across the Consortia, while at the same time, allowing regional priorities to be reflected.
- The development of a standard set of metrics for reporting performance data should be an important element of a standardized accountability framework.

OTHER

Recommendation 6: The Consortia should explore the use of alternate delivery methods to meet the needs of clients in remote areas.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Consortia PD is generally offered in larger centers. Stakeholders located in remote areas of the province reported that travel costs to attend many sessions are often prohibitive.
- The development of SuperNet is making it more feasible for PD to be provided by distance delivery to remote sites through approaches such as audio and video-conferencing.

Recommendation 7: The Consortia and school authorities should collaboratively develop mechanisms that effectively communicate the availability of PD.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Feedback from parents, School Council Chairs and non-certificated staff indicated that many of them feel they are not able to access PD because they do not receive the information sent out by the Consortia. As well, they indicate that they do not have access to the financial support required to participate.
- The 2003 School Council Review identified a need for enhanced training for School Council members.

Recommendation 8: Alberta Education should continue to review Consortia annual reports based on the revised financial and program outcomes reporting standards developed in conjunction with the review.

Rationale and Clarifying Details

- With the adoption of an outcomes-based accountability structure, Consortia will be in a position to provide better quality program delivery and results information. Annual review by the department of these outcomes-based reports, with feedback to the Consortia, will continue to strengthen each Consortium's annual reporting process and will support policy development and decision-making.
- System Improvement and Reporting and the School Improvement Branch have been working collaboratively with Consortia Executive Directors to standardize the reporting of financial information and to refine the reporting of program results based on outcomes.

Recommendation 9: This report should be shared within government and with stakeholders to enhance planning, implementation and evaluation of PD within the learning system.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Government's review of the Alberta Commission on Learning's recommendations related to PD could be usefully informed through the broad input received during the Consortium assessment.

Recommendation 10

That Alberta Education facilitate a Professional Development working group that includes representation from the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia and other key partners providing PD services, to enhance the coordination of PD, the evaluation of PD, and the communication of the purpose and benefits of PD to education stakeholders.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- A number of education partners provide PD services, particularly in large urban centers, and enhanced coordination of PD will increase the ability of all PD providers to ensure that a high quality of programming is maintained and unnecessary duplication is avoided.
- One of the challenges is determining how effective PD has been for improving practice that results in improved student learning. Working collaboratively with key partners who provide PD services will increase the focus on the components of effective PD, the purposes of PD, and the evaluation of its effectiveness.
- In order to support the time allotted for PD, parents need to know and understand the benefits of effective PD for their child's learning.

2. INTRODUCTION

The six Regional Professional Development Consortia were established according to Alberta Education's *Guidelines for Establishing Regional Consortia* (1995). In November 2000, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Basic Learning met with provincial leaders of the education partners to discuss the issue of sustainability of the Consortia. At that meeting, a need for an assessment of the regional Consortia was identified.

The Assistant Deputy Minister of Basic Learning and the Assistant Deputy Minister of System Improvement and Reporting of Alberta Education were the sponsors of the assessment. An Advisory Committee was established with representation from each of the major stakeholder organizations that were named in the 1995 *Guideline* document. The Advisory Committee helped develop the terms of reference for the assessment, which were approved by the project sponsors (see Appendix One for the terms of reference). The project sponsors approved the following as the purpose of the assessment:

1. To determine how well the primary purposes identified for the Consortia in 1995 have been achieved;
2. To determine whether the Consortia model continues to be effective;
3. To make recommendations concerning the future role of the Consortia; and
4. To ensure that the accountability process measures and reports the degree to which stakeholders needs are met.

This report summarizes the findings of the assessment of the Consortia.

3. CURRENT CONSORTIA PURPOSES AND OPERATIONAL MODEL

3.1. Consortia Purposes

The six purposes identified for the Consortia in 1995 were as follows:

1. To support the successful implementation of school jurisdiction goals as identified in board and school education plans as well as the goals and strategies of Alberta Education's three-year education plan;
2. To undertake the development of professional development programs to meet emerging education needs;
3. To broker, coordinate, evaluate and act as a clearinghouse for available training and development resources;
4. To use a collaborative and coordinated approach to the delivery and support of on-going professional development opportunities for all participants in education;
5. To help implement school based decision-making, school councils and the functions included in redefined roles and responsibilities, and
6. To provide access to in-service, training and professional development programs at a reasonable cost.

3.2. Consortia Operational Model

The key components of the current Consortia model are as follows:

1. There are six Consortia, as listed below, each with a specific geographic region to serve:
 - Learning Network: East Central Regional Consortium
 - Northwest Regional Learning Consortium
 - Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium
 - Central Alberta Regional Consortium
 - Calgary Regional Consortium
 - Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium
2. Each Consortium is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives from the following:
 - Alberta School Boards Association (1)
 - College of Alberta School Superintendents (1)
 - Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (1)
 - Alberta Teachers' Association (3 – professional development staff, administrator, teacher)
 - Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (1)
 - A post-secondary institution representative (1)
 - Alberta Education (ex officio)
3. The Consortium Board of Directors hires an Executive Director, who is responsible for managing the affairs of the Consortium. The Board negotiates an employment contract with the Executive Director and conducts an annual performance review.
4. Jurisdictions have responsibility for the professional development of their staff, and are funded to do so. Executive Directors conduct needs assessments and collaborate with schools and jurisdictions in their geographic area to plan and deliver PD in relation to locally identified needs.
5. The Executive Directors collaborate to provide leadership for the provision of province-wide PD. Collaboration between the Executive Directors leads to synergies and capacity development for PD delivery in the province. A direct result is the ability to deliver PD at a low cost because of the economies of scale that result when PD is planned and delivered province-wide. Examples of collaboration and delivery of province-wide PD include the following:
 - The Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium and the Calgary Regional Consortium collaborated to secure funding for, and to develop *Teaching and Learning With Technology (TLT)*,
 - The Northwest Regional Learning Consortium is coordinating PD in support of the *FNMI School-Community Environment Project*,

- The Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium coordinates province-wide provision of French-language PD.
6. The Consortia offer PD on an over-all cost-recovery, not-for-profit basis (i.e. some offerings generate surplus revenues, others are run at a deficit, with the overall objective being to achieve a long-term break-even). Consortia operations are supported by a variety of means, including the following:
 - Alberta Education provides infrastructure funding of \$159,908 per annum for each Consortium, to pay for the salary of the Executive Director plus related administrative costs (i.e. support staff, travel, promotion and communications, office expenses etc.).
 - Alberta Education also from time-to-time will provide targeted funding to support implementation of new curricula and other departmental initiatives.
 - Funding for PD is provided directly to school jurisdictions as a component of their annual grants. The Consortia access these funds on a competitive basis with other public and private-sector providers of PD.
 - Jurisdictions, educational institutions and the Alberta Teachers' Association provide in-kind contributions to the Consortia in support of PD.
 - The Consortia also receive funds from other levels of government (e.g. \$100,000 is received annually from the federal government in support of French-language PD).
 - Material and cash contributions are sometimes received from the private sector (e.g. funds received from Shaw Communications in support of the development of *Teaching and Learning With Technology*).
 7. The Consortia each maintain a reserve for use as working capital. These funds are used to pay for the up-front costs of workshops and are then replenished through the workshop session tuition fees. They also represent a contingency to cover the financial risks inherent in the delivery of market-driven programming.
 8. The Consortia receive financial administration assistance from a designated "agent board". The agent board is an education partner designated to receive funding on behalf of the Consortium and through which Consortium financial transactions are managed. Consortium financial records are audited as part of the agent board's audit.
 9. A variety of approaches are used to deliver PD, including workshops, conferences, stand-alone sessions, or a series of workshops on a particular topic.
 10. The Consortia are required to provide an annual financial report to Alberta Education (a statement of revenues and expenses and a statement of financial position), and a report of PD provided. Forms are provided for that purpose in the Funding Manual for School Authorities.

4. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The assessment was guided by the project sponsors, Rick Morrow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Basic Learning, and Jim Dueck, Assistant Deputy Minister, System Improvement and Reporting. The assessment benefited from ongoing advice and input provided by the Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from educational stakeholders, as follows:

- Christine Ayling - Alberta Home and School Councils' Association
- Deb Beck - Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
- Larry Beauchamp – University of Alberta
- Jim Brandon - College of Alberta School Superintendents
- Earl Choldin – Alberta Regional Consortia
- Terry Gunderson - Alberta School Boards Association
- Jacqueline Skytt - Alberta Teachers' Association
- Niki Wosnack (Chair), Dianna Millard, Peter Malcolm, Bill Spaans – Alberta Education

The assessment was undertaken in two phases as follows:

4.1. Phase One: Review of Consortia Reports and Accountability Documents

A review of available historical documents was undertaken (including the 1995 *Guidelines for Establishing Regional Consortia*). The review indicated that no specific planning and reporting requirements have been defined for the Consortia, with the exception of annual financial reports and an annual report providing program details as defined in the department's *Funding Manual for School Authorities*. The phase one review analyzed what additional elements might be added to annual reports if the Consortia were to operate within a “standardized” accountability framework.

The process of analysis involved examining Alberta Education files related to the six Consortia since their inception, including formal annual reports, administrative reports from regular meetings of Consortia boards, and financial records. Consortia websites were also examined, as some of them contained information not found in the department's paper files.

4.2. Phase Two: Stakeholder Consultations

4.2.1. Surveys

Surveys were developed and sent to each of the major stakeholder groups, as identified in the survey plan (see Appendix Two). Separate surveys were developed for each of the following groups: superintendents or their designates; principals; teachers and school staff; and school council chairs. All surveys were sent via e-mail to the superintendent, with the request that they be forwarded to schools for further distribution by the principal to the appropriate group of respondents. Respondents were given the option of responding on-line, or by FAX or regular mail.

The superintendent and principal surveys were first distributed in May 2003, with the request that responses be submitted no later than the end of June. The response rate was low, so superintendents and principals were given a second opportunity to respond in September 2003. Teachers, staff and school council chair surveys were distributed in September 2003, with the request that these be returned by mid-October.

ASBA also conducted a survey and made a focus group session available to its members at a general meeting of the membership. Results are reported in the “stakeholder organization feedback” section of this report.

4.2.2. Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with representatives of the stakeholder groups in each of the six regions served by the Consortia (see the Survey Plan, Appendix Two, for details). In addition, a special focus group session was held for those from remote northern schools and/or jurisdictions, and a session was held for the Francophone jurisdictions.

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain qualitative feedback from clients served by the Consortia to complement the feedback received via the surveys. Focus group participants were engaged in two focused discussions:

- In the first they were asked to provide feedback on the ongoing relevance of the six original Consortia purpose statements.
- Next they were asked to respond to the questions: “What works well?”, “What needs improvement?” and “What needs does your group have that the Consortium could address?”

The number of attendees at the focus group sessions was as follows:

	Focus Group Location	Number Attending
Learning Network: East Central Regional Consortium	St. Paul	12
Northwest Regional Learning Consortium	Peace River	16
Edmonton Regional Consortium	Edmonton	10
Central Alberta Regional Consortium	Red Deer	15
Calgary Regional Consortium	Calgary	13
Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium	Lethbridge	14
Francophone jurisdictions	Edmonton	7
Remote northern schools/jurisdictions	Peace River	3
TOTAL		90

4.2.3. Stakeholder Organization Feedback

Stakeholder organizations were given an opportunity to provide input to the review. The questions for which a response was sought were as follows:

1. From the point of view of the group you represent, has the Consortium in your area met the goals established for it in 1995?
2. Should the current Consortia model be retained? If not, how should it be modified?

3. Does your group wish to make recommendations relative to the future role of the Consortia? If so, what are those recommendations?
4. Would your group want to enhance the accountability process for the Consortia? If so, in what way?
5. Do you have any other comments?

Feedback was received from the following stakeholder groups:¹

- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta Teachers Association
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
- College of Alberta School Superintendents
- Red Deer College
- Consortia Executive Directors
- Alberta Home and School Councils' Association

4.3. LIMITATIONS

4.3.1. Document Review

The document review was based on planning and reporting documents that had been submitted by the Consortia to Alberta Education during the period 1996/97 to 2001/02. This document review was then supplemented with a scan of Consortia websites. The findings and recommendations related to the Consortia accountability processes are based on this limited review. However, the findings and recommendations of the review were subsequently tabled with the project sponsors, the project advisory committee and with the Consortia Executive Directors for review and comment. The findings and recommendations were upheld through this review process and, as a result of this review, Alberta Education has been working with the Executive Directors to develop a common accountability framework for the Consortia, consistent with one of the recommendations resulting from the review.

4.3.2. Stakeholder Surveys

Although an opportunity was provided to all superintendents, principals, teachers, non-certificated staff and School Council Chairs to respond to the on-line survey. The total number of respondents to the surveys was 944, broken down by role as follows:

	Superintendents	Principals	Teachers	Non-certificated Staff	School Council Chairs	Total
May Administration	17	122	--	--	--	139
September Administration	27	176	472	91	39	805
TOTAL¹	44	298	472	91	39	944

¹ The School Technology Advisory Committee (STAC) also asked to provide input. STAC is not one of the original stakeholder organizations involved in the establishment of the Consortia, but their input was also accepted.

The total number of responses was sufficient to give meaningful input to the Consortia review at an aggregate level. However, it did not provide a basis for analysis at the level of individual Consortia.

A concern with the project methodology is that the surveys were distributed to the schools via the office of the district superintendent. However, focus group feedback subsequently revealed that many school staff, particularly non-certificated staff, and school council chairs, did not receive the survey instrument. In some cases principals admitted that they did not pass on the questionnaires because, in their opinion, they did not have as high a priority as other communications also going to their staff. This limitation inherent in the use of the regular communications channels was also found to be true for communications forwarded to schools by the Consortia.

4.3.3. Focus Groups

Focus group results reflect the collective responses of the individuals that attended the sessions. Invitees to these focus groups were chosen to provide balanced input from all potential Consortia clients, and to reflect the special needs of the Francophone jurisdictions and of jurisdictions in remote areas of the province.

Although care was taken to invite participants from all stakeholder groups, not all invited participants were able to attend. This was particularly true for non-certificated staff, who often could not get the release time required to attend the focus group session. The input from focus groups is limited by the ability of attendees to represent the interests of all stakeholders, and by the ability of process facilitators to accurately capture the input provided by participants.

4.3.4. Stakeholder Organizations Feedback

Solicitation of stakeholder input was not part of the initial methodology for this project, since the stakeholders are represented on the project advisory committee. However, since the advisory committee focused primarily on the process of the project, stakeholder representatives indicated a desire to provide content input to the review. Stakeholder organizations were invited to provide their input using a specific set of questions (see page 10 of this report). Not all stakeholder organizations responded to the invitation to provide input. A limitation of this step in the Consortia review is that the information received from these submissions only represents the opinions of the stakeholder organizations that responded to the invitation.

¹ The totals do not include 26 respondents who did not specify their role.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Phase One Findings

5.1.1. General Findings

1. All six Consortia have provided annual reports to Alberta Education each year since they were established.
2. All Consortia have based their operations and annual reporting on the six purposes identified in the 1995 *Guidelines*.
3. Annual reports contain information that exceeds the minimum official requirements for reporting by Consortia, modest though these requirements have been to date. The financial and program data submitted annually provide some perspective on the scope and volume of Consortia operations. However, it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions from the analysis of the aggregate data because of definitional and methodological differences in the way the data are gathered and reported.
4. Annual reports demonstrate a clear intent on the part of all Consortia to provide high quality professional development programs to all client groups.
5. Annual reports emphasize the importance of obtaining feedback from program participants and demonstrate clear commitment to using that feedback to improve future service. They also show that Consortia place considerable importance on planning programs through needs assessments.
6. Annual reports and minutes from board meetings provide clear evidence that all Consortia operate on the basis of a strong desire to coordinate their programs with other key providers of professional development programming. This is supported through the balanced membership on Consortia boards of directors, as defined in the 1995 *Guidelines*.

Each board has representation from the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards' Association, the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, Alberta universities and colleges, and Alberta Education. The Guidelines also contemplated business and community organization representation, where possible.

7. Performance measures included in Consortia reporting documents are almost entirely input, process and output measures. With the exception of reporting by some Consortia in some years on the results of participant evaluations of PD programs, there is no consistent reporting of *outcomes*.

The following table summarizes the degree to which the annual reports of the Consortia, in aggregate, have presented information that might be expected if they were to report along the same lines as school jurisdictions in their Annual Education Results Reports.

Accountability Elements	# Of Consortia Reporting Each Element		
	In Annual Report	On Website ¹	Total
Vision	3	1	4
Mission	3	2	5
Goals ²	1	1	2
Outcomes	4		4
Performance Measures ³	6		6
Planned Targets	0		0
Financial Statements	6		6
Six Original Purposes ⁴	5		5

Notes:

1. Other than in a web version of the annual report.
2. Most frequently, Consortia use the six purposes outlined in the 1995 guidelines as “goals” and report against each one. Only those that have established goals other than the six purposes are included in the totals in this row.
3. All Consortia have included some form of quantitative summary in their reports, although none of the reported measures are outcomes-oriented.
4. These are included as they form the official basis for developing and delivering programs, and assessing results.

5.1.2. Report Structure

The reports bear the following common structural features:

1. *Common structural ground:* All reports contain the financial summaries required by Alberta Education. This reflects the priority placed on financial reporting when the Consortia were established. Beyond this, most reports are organized around the original six purposes for which the Consortia were established in 1995. Otherwise, reporting styles vary substantially among the six Consortia, reflecting regional priorities and the particular local purposes for which each report is designed.
2. *Consistent reporting structure:* Most of the Consortia maintain a significant degree of consistency from year to year in the structure and content of their annual reports. This is useful in allowing comparisons over time to be made. However, the Consortia do not use a consistent outcomes-based accountability framework for annual reporting, which makes comparison or aggregation of results problematic.
3. *Performance measures:* Reported performance or results measures consist primarily of data on the number of programs offered and participants who attended. There is a certain degree of consistency in reporting of this type of data – each of the Consortia reported on these two variables. However, some Consortia provide only two summary numbers, embedded in the text of the report, while others provide more detailed tabulated information on specific programs (or groups of programs) offered, participants, course locations, costs, etc.
4. *Financial reports:* As it is the most specific formal reporting required by Alberta Education and the format is prescribed in the Funding Manual for School Authorities, there is a high degree of compliance and comparability in financial reporting between Consortia in each year and over time within each Consortium.

The following table summarizes the most recent financial data for all six Consortia combined. Additional detail is provided in Appendix Three.

Summary of 2002-03 and 2001-02 Actual Revenues and Expenses – All Consortia

Revenues

	2002/03	2001/02
Alberta Education Establishment and Maintenance Grants	\$ 959,448	\$ 959,448
Other Alberta Government Sources (conditional grants)	345,755	346,175
From Other Sources (including registration fees)	<u>1,158,571</u>	<u>1,007,301</u>
Total Revenues (excluding transfers from accumulated surpluses/reserves ¹)	2,463,774	2,312,924

Expenses

Salaries, Wages, Benefits	\$ 704,173	\$ 530,129
Services, Contracts, Supplies ²	1,907,270	1,670,738
Board Expenses (including travel and subsistence)	<u>18,487</u>	<u>11,357</u>
Total Expenditures	2,629,930	2,213,620

Revenues Minus Expenditures (before transfers from surpluses/reserves) \$(166,156) \$ 99,304

Revenues Minus Expenditures (after transfers from surpluses/reserves) \$ 65,929 \$ 215,285

Although the various Consortia reports share common structural features, there is considerable variation in the level of detail included on both program participation and finances. Because of this variability, it is not reasonable to conduct comparative analysis of the Consortia at a detailed level. However, some overall indicators of the scope of Consortia operations can be derived, as illustrated below (see Appendix Three for additional examples and a discussion of the limitations of these indicators).

	2002/03	2001/02
Total Number of Participants (from annual reports)	16,961	14,613 ³
Total Number of Programs/Sessions (from annual reports)	511	594
Average Number of Participants per Program/Session	33	25
Total Revenues (before transfers) per Program/Session	\$ 4,821	\$ 3,894
Total Expenditures per Program/Session	\$ 5,147	\$ 3,727
Imputed per program/session excess/(deficiency) of revenue over expense	\$(1,424)	\$ 167

¹ Consortia may carry a surplus from year to year to provide for unanticipated fluctuations in revenue and expense flows. This is prudent business practice, given the consortia's mandate to operate on a cost-recovery basis and exposure to financial risk. The presentation has been standardized and may not reflect the way a consortium reported its accumulated surplus/reserve. In addition, it is possible that both revenues and surpluses may be overstated in some consortia financial summaries, as they may contain the carry-over amounts of conditional grants awarded but not entirely spent in prior fiscal years.

² Includes all office supplies, communications, administrative and non-program contract expenses, as well as the direct costs of providing PD programs.

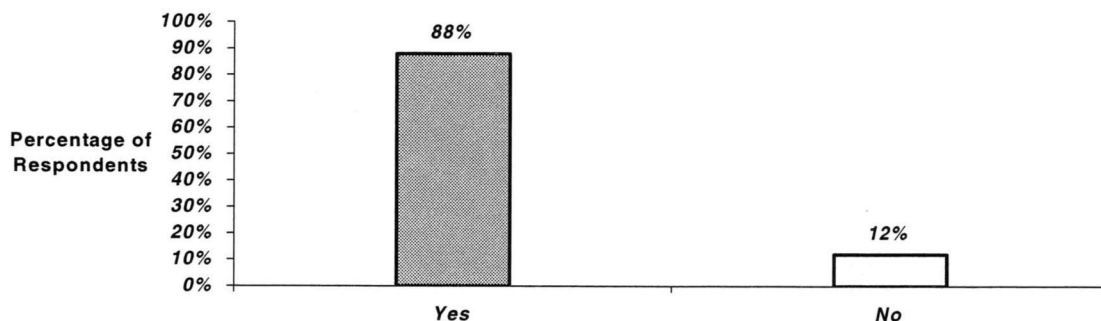
³ Includes an estimate from one Consortium. The actual number may be either higher or lower by a modest amount.

5.2. Phase Two Findings

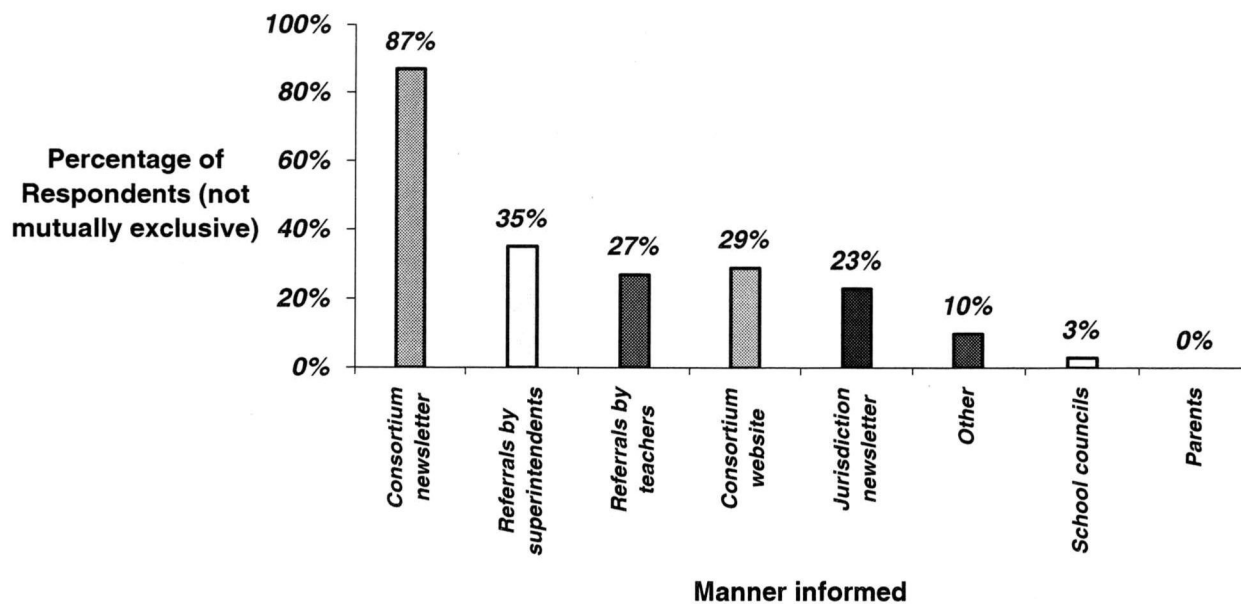
5.2.1. Stakeholder Survey

A large percentage of survey respondents (88%) indicated that they had received information about PD programs from the Consortium in their region. The most frequently cited source of information was the Consortium newsletter.

Do you receive information about PD programs from your regional consortia?

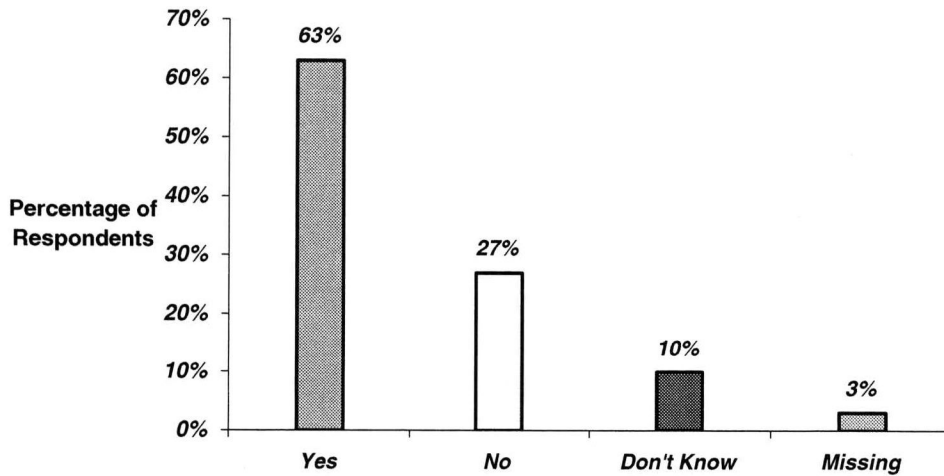


How are you usually informed about consortium programs?

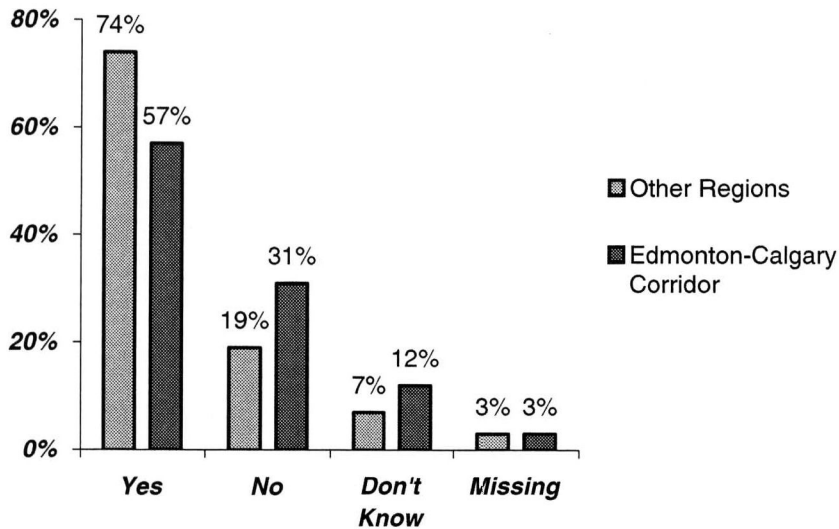


A large percentage of the survey respondents had participated in Consortia sponsored PD activities, indicating a high level of familiarity with the Consortia among respondents. It is interesting to note however that the percentage of participants was higher outside the Edmonton – Calgary corridor (i.e. those served by East Central, Northwest and Southern Alberta Consortia).

Have you participated in PD sponsored by a regional consortium?



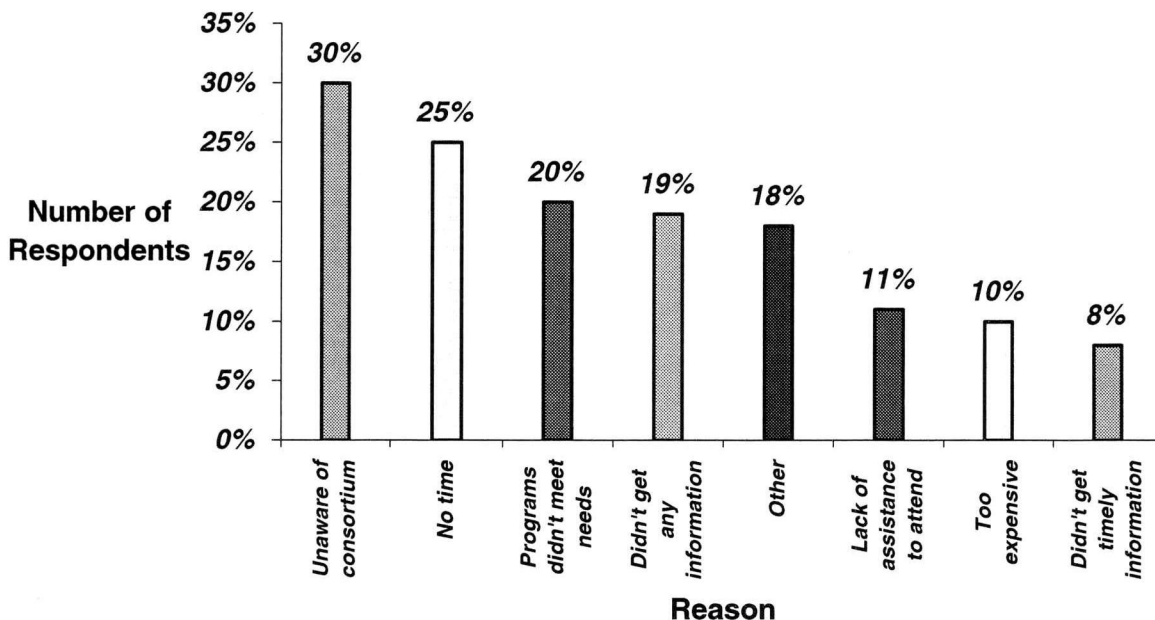
Have you participated in consortia sponsored PD - Edmonton-Calgary Corridor vs Other



The lower percentage of respondents reporting participating from the Edmonton-Calgary corridor may well reflect the greater availability of PD opportunities for those in closer proximity to the larger urban centers.

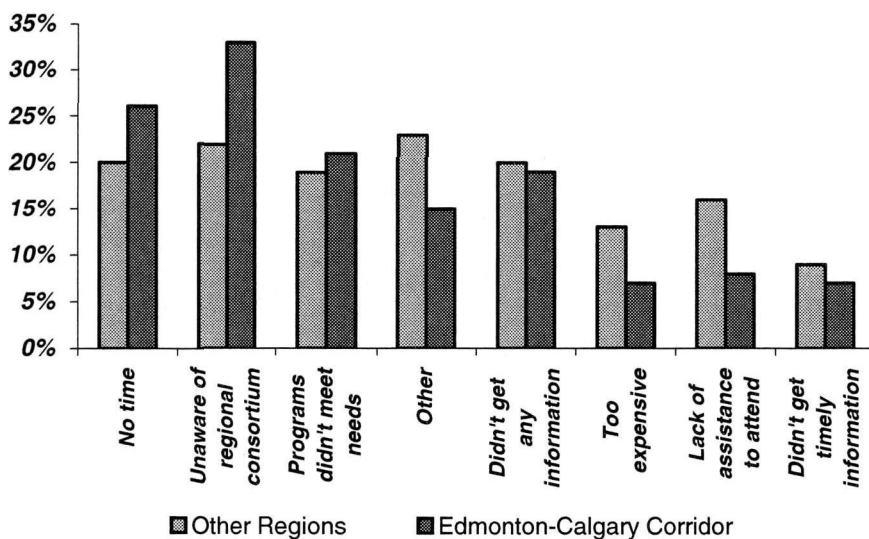
Reasons for not participating in PD varied, but it is interesting to note that the highest percentage response (30%) was “unaware of regional consortium”.

Reason for not participating in PD



The reasons for not participating varied for respondents from the Edmonton – Calgary corridor compared with those from other regions. A greater percentage of Calgary, Central Alberta and Edmonton respondents indicated that they were unaware of the Consortia.

Reasons for not participating in PD Edmonton - Calgary Corridor vs Other Regions



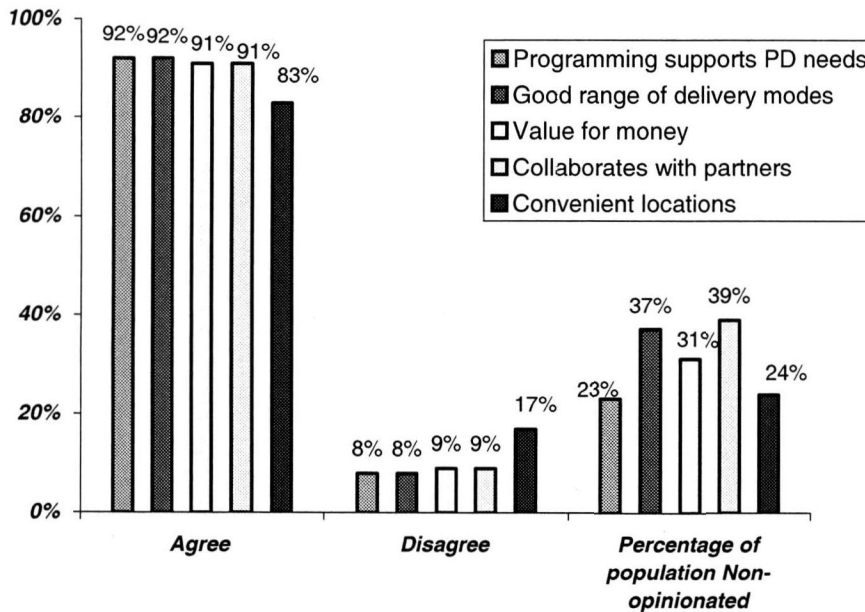
Respondents were asked to comment on the extent they agreed with the following statements:

The Professional Development Consortium:

- *offers programming that supports my professional development needs*
- *delivers programming using a an appropriate range of delivery modes*
- *delivers value for the money it costs me or my school to attend*
- *collaborates with key partner organizations to deliver an appropriate array of PD opportunities*
- *delivers programming at a location that is convenient*

The non-response rates for these questions tended to be high; however, for those who did respond the assessments were very positive.

Based on respondents own or staff professional development needs:



NOTE: Agree and disagree - as a percentage of opinionated responses.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement with the following statements:

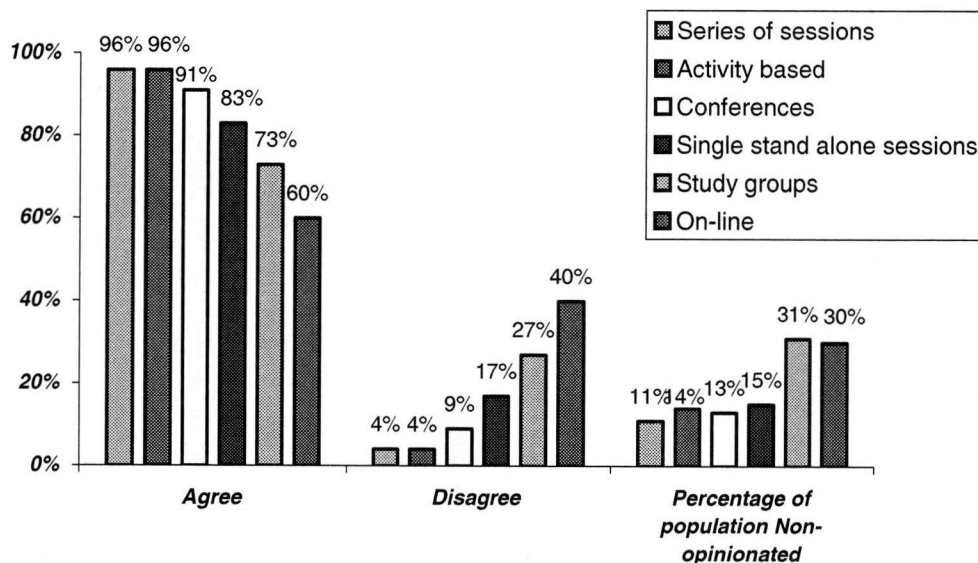
The following PD formats are effective in relation to your professional development needs:

- *single/stand-alone awareness sessions*
- *a series of PD activities focused on specific skills or knowledge development*
- *activity-based learning*
- *on-line learning*
- *conferences*
- *study groups*

The delivery formats that received the highest ratings were: *a series of PD activities; activity-based learning; conferences; and single stand alone sessions. Study groups and on-line learning*

both had a high non-response rate and a higher percentage of respondents disagreeing that these are effective formats.

Most Effective PD Formats

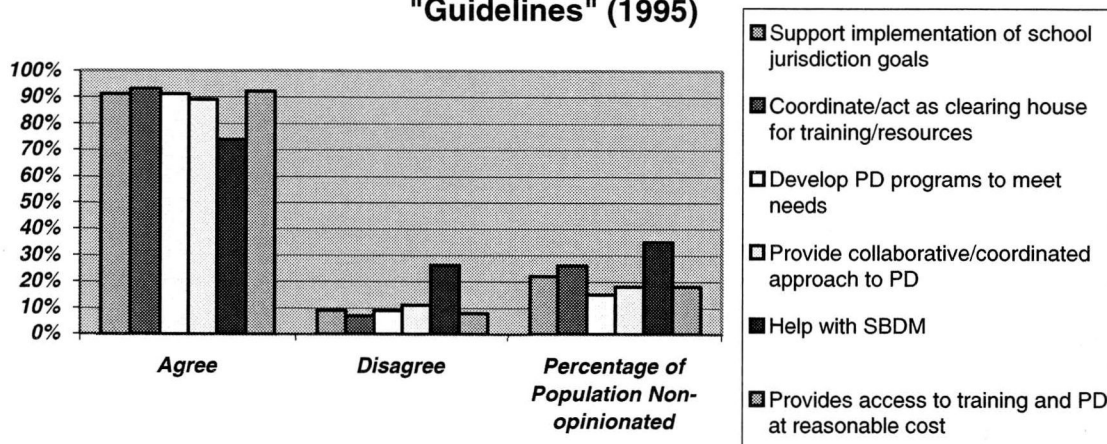


NOTE: "Agree" and "disagree" were calculated as a percentage of opinionated responses.

Respondents were asked if the six Consortia had fulfilled the purposes as established in 1995.

- For the opinionated respondents there was virtually 90% agreement with each of the purpose statements, except for purpose statement five ("to help implement school based decision-making, school councils and the functions included in redefined roles and responsibilities").
- Some 35% of all respondents had no opinion about purpose five and for those who did express an opinion, 72% agreed that this purpose had been fulfilled, a percentage considerably lower than that for the five other purposes.

Consortium has fulfilled the purposes as set out in "Guidelines" (1995)

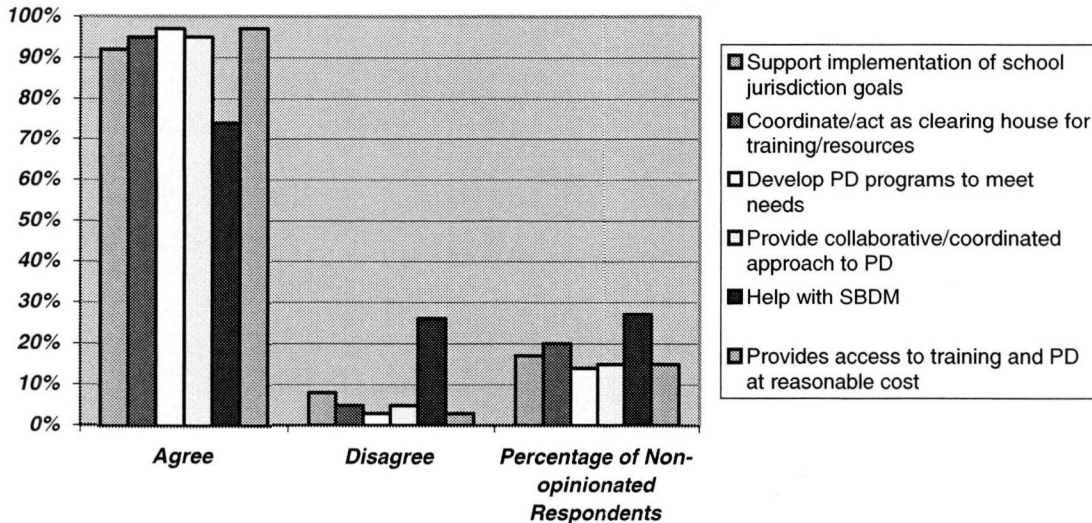


NOTE: "Agree" and "disagree" were calculated as a percentage of opinionated responses.

Respondents were also asked to comment on whether the six original purposes are still valid.

- As indicated in the chart that follows, respondents were strongly in agreement that the purposes are still valid.
- Purpose five again had the lowest percentage of opinionated respondents agreeing (72%) and highest percentage of non-respondents (35%).

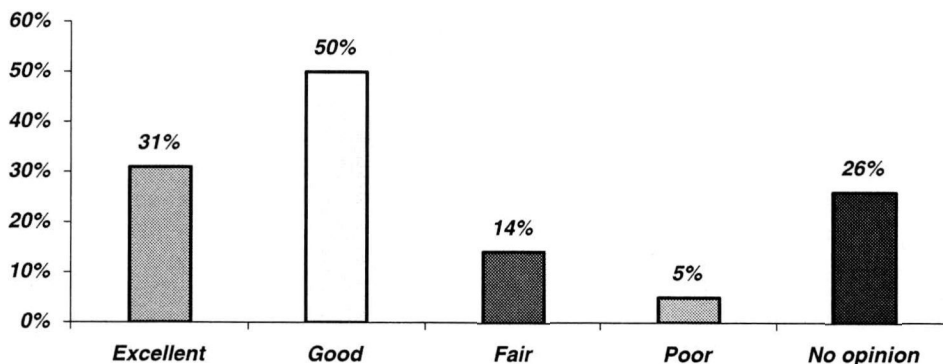
The purposes in the "Guidelines" (1995) are still valid



NOTE: "Agree" and "disagree" were calculated as a percentage of opinionated responses.

In answer to the question "How would you rate the overall service provided by the professional development consortium in your area?", a very large majority (81%) rated the service as either excellent or good.

Rating of the Overall Service Provided by the Respondents' Regional Consortium



5.2.2. Focus Groups

Purpose Statements

A total of seventeen (17) individual group responses were gathered during the focus group process. In general, the existing purposes were considered to be valid, with the exception of the purpose related to school-based decision-making and school council support (Purpose Statement Five). The overarching purpose, represented in Purpose Statement One, was the most frequently cited as needing modification or clarification. One group considered completely rewriting the purposes, so that there would be only one purpose statement, with goals and process guidelines listed below it.

The responses to the purpose statements did not vary by type of focus group participant. Certificated staff, non-certificated staff and parent participants made similar comments. However, they did differ somewhat according to location or region. In some places, it was felt, for example, that elements of Purpose Statement Five needed to be retained, while in others, participants felt that this purpose could simply be deleted because it was covered implicitly in other purpose statements.

The most frequent comments about the purpose statements related to defining terminology more clearly and eliminating duplication between various statements. These comments can be summed up in an observation that they could be simplified and perhaps captured in a reduced number of purpose statements.

What Works Well?

The Consortia were most frequently commended for their responsiveness and flexibility. This is supported by the high level of overall satisfaction expressed with the service provided, the quality of the program offerings and the helpfulness and expertise of Consortia staff. High commendation was also given for the reasonable cost of programs.

Communication was often mentioned as working well, but it was also cited frequently in the comments related to areas needing improvement. This illustrates the wide variability of individual experiences across the province, in different regions as well as in particular schools or school jurisdictions within one region.

What Needs Improvement?/What Needs Could the Consortia Address?

These two questions were initially asked separately of focus group participants. It became clear very early in the focus group process that many of the comments sparked by the latter question fell into the category of suggestions for improvement and were not new needs. For that reason, the feedback from both of these questions has been summarized together.

Focus group participants identified three main areas for improvement. The overwhelming bulk of improvement-related comments dealt with **communication and marketing**. The most frequent concern was that individual staff in schools are not aware of Consortia program offerings. The

reasons for this communication gap vary, with some staff indicating that they don't see Consortia newsletters or that there is no discussion among staff about the local Consortium. In other cases, there is a difference between types of staff, with support staff more likely to report not receiving information about PD related to their roles in the school, or not being aware that they are eligible to attend certain sessions. Relatively little can be done by the Consortia themselves about these gaps. School jurisdiction central offices or school principals are in the best position to improve internal information flow processes.

Where Consortia could make a difference is through the more widespread use of email and more active use of their websites. There would be a noticeable benefit to staff in some areas of the province if program updates were sent out between publication of the regular newsletter. It was noted, however, that the practice of individual Consortia in this regard varies, and the email systems in school jurisdictions do not all offer direct access to all staff.

The most successful communication processes reported by staff are where copies of Consortia newsletters and announcements are placed in each staff member's (and school council chair's) mailbox, or where they are sent by email to all staff. The presence of an active PD committee in a school also makes a big difference in the quality of communication about Consortia programs. Participants in some groups clearly reported a need for better support from central offices of school jurisdictions for the work of the Consortia.

A second significant area where a need for improvement was identified is in the **provision of PD programs for teacher assistants, particularly those working with students with special needs**. A common complaint voiced by focus group participants from this category of support staff was that they did not know how to work effectively with the classroom teacher to enhance the learning of the students they were assigned to help. The solution suggested by these staff included the encouragement of joint attendance by teachers and their assistants, as well as more sessions related to understanding the various problems faced by students requiring additional help in the classroom. As in the case of the communication issues identified above, the solution rests to a significant degree in the hands of schools and school jurisdictions.

In addition to the need for joint PD for teachers and classroom assistants, parent and support staff participants expressed a keen interest in being able to attend relevant PD sessions with teachers, either where matters related to students with special needs (including the gifted and talented) were being addressed or when general curriculum information was being provided. In some locations, support staff and parents reported being actively discouraged by the school from attending such sessions, because the content was only intended for teachers. These reports do not reflect negatively on Consortia for two reasons. Firstly, the Consortia were not identified as the source of the discouragement, and secondly, it is not clear that participants who reported this phenomenon knew if the local Consortium or another organization was responsible for offering the session.

Along with the difficulties of participating in joint teacher/teaching assistant/parent PD, a third issue was fairly consistently identified related to **cost as a barrier to participation by teacher assistants (and parents)**. In some jurisdictions, teacher assistants reported not being provided with release time to attend PD sessions or funding to pay for the costs of attending. These issues

are not ones that the Consortia can address directly. Issues related to the provision of financial support and release time may result from poor communication or policies on supporting PD activities within individual schools or jurisdictions.

Focus group participants also confirmed the presence of the ongoing issue related to **providing programs and services to parents**. As they are not employees of a school, they may not have access to any funding to support attendance at Consortia events. To the extent that this is a common issue, it may be addressed on a province-wide basis by the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association. However, the regional Consortia are keenly aware of this issue and generally offer free or heavily subsidized programs for parents from the revenues generated by other programs.

A broad range of other issues was expressed. The following were mentioned by at least three groups as being significant.

- Non-certificated staff should be represented on Consortia boards
- Consortia should inform clients about PD resource materials held in Consortia offices and how they can gain access to it (a web-based catalogue was suggested)
- Distinguish between individual and group (staff) development and maintain a balance between the two; develop and deliver structured programs where sessions build on each other
- “Professional Development” as a term is not inclusive – parents and certain kinds of support staff do not see themselves as recipients of “professional” development
- Use of alternate delivery modes such as teleconferencing and internet to deliver programs
- Needs assessments: use Consortia newsletter as a tool for gathering information about PD needs; use focus groups to determine needs (to avoid survey fatigue)
- Need for enhanced PD planning and coordination between Consortia, between school jurisdictions, and with teachers’ convention boards; use Consortia more actively to facilitate networking between school jurisdictions
- Continued and enhanced provision of PD related to new curriculum and ongoing support of regularly repeated PD in specific subject areas where teachers would benefit from targeted training (such as math and the sciences)
- Enhancement of Consortia websites, with the possibility of using the central (ARC) site more actively

5.2.3. Stakeholder Groups Feedback

Input received from stakeholder organizations was as follows:

1. From the point of view of the group you represent, has the Consortium in your area met the goals established for it in 1995?
 - There was a general consensus that the Consortia had fulfilled their original purposes. Several respondents noted that the Consortia had more than met the expectations of their particular stakeholder group.
 - It was noted that Purpose Five (“to help implement school based decision-making, school councils and the functions included in redefined roles and responsibilities”) had

been fulfilled and was no longer needed. This should be replaced with a purpose statement that focuses the Consortia on supporting the implementation of new curricula.

- The need to focus more effectively on PD for parents and School Councils was mentioned; however, the particular challenges in doing so (i.e. lack of finances and time for parental participation in PD) were recognized. School staff not involved in the classroom (custodial, transportation, secretarial etc.) were cited as currently under-served by the Consortia.
2. Should the current Consortia model be retained? If not, how should it be modified?
- Most responding organizations felt that the current model should be retained. The current model is seen as allowing for province-wide PD, but still providing for local autonomy. Having stakeholder organizations on the Boards provides an avenue for broad input.
 - The “collaborative leadership endeavors” were cited as a strength of the Consortia. Note was made of “world class” PD sponsored by the Consortia, such as *Reaching and Teaching*, *Staff Learning for Students’ Sake*, *Professional Learning Communities*, and the *Small Schools Conference*.
 - It was suggested that each Board should ensure that it has an AHSCA representative serving on it, or a representative from one of the School Councils in the region served by the Consortium.
 - The model is seen as helping small rural jurisdictions more than the large urban jurisdictions.
3. Does your group wish to make recommendations relative to the future role of the Consortia? If so, what are those recommendations?
- Several stakeholder groups noted the need for the Consortia to work collaboratively with other organizations providing PD (the ATA and post-secondary institutions were specifically cited).
 - Several groups mentioned the need for stable funding for the Consortia. In addition, the need for adequate funding in relation to PD in support of new curriculum implementation was noted.
 - It was suggested that Consortia provide workshops in locations that ensure greater equity for rural areas of the province. In particular, more local delivery of PD was suggested to facilitate parental involvement.
 - Parent involvement was recognized as a key variable in student success. Improved communication to parents was seen as necessary to foster parents’ involvement in PD aimed at equipping them to help their child.
4. Would your group want to enhance the accountability process for the Consortia? If so, in what way?
- There was general satisfaction with current levels of accountability. The cost-recovery model was seen as already providing a high degree of accountability.

- There was recognition that a standardized accountability model would facilitate accountability; however, it was suggested that the model should not be burdensome in terms of the number of measures included and should be flexible enough to allow for adequate reflection of local circumstances.
5. Do you have any other comments?
- Increasing demands to participate on advisory committees, joint projects between Consortia, support for new curricula implementation and the requirement to become more accountable were cited as challenges for the Executive Directors.
 - The use of more alternate delivery formats and the need for increased flexibility in workshop locations, were cited as required improvements to better meet the PD needs in rural areas.
 - Attendance by parents should be possible at all Consortia-sponsored PD.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. Purpose of the Consortia

In general, the purpose statements appear to still be relevant, except for Purpose Statement Five that is related to the specific role the Consortia had in 1995 related to school-based decision-making and the new role of School Councils. Feedback indicated that implementation of school-based decision-making had occurred and there is no longer a need for a specific focus by the Consortia on this. School Councils still require PD support, however, and there was thus a desire to retain this emphasis in some fashion.

6.2. Consortia Model

The Consortia model was also seen as having significant strengths. Flexibility and cost-effectiveness were often-cited attributes of Consortia operations. Some areas for improvement were noted:

- The assurance of stable funding was frequently cited as a necessity for the Consortia to be able to engage more effectively in long-term planning.
- Non-certificated staff, School Council Chairs and parents felt under-served by the Consortia. Communication to these groups needs to be improved. However, there was general recognition that effective communication is a joint responsibility of all stakeholders. Often Consortia are making information available, but it is not being passed on to all those who need the information.
- School Council Chairs and non-certificated staff also felt under-represented in terms of Consortia decision-making. In some regions it is difficult to find school council representatives for Consortia boards and non-certificated staff are not represented at all. As a result, they are not effectively involved in setting direction for the Consortia.
- Feedback from remote areas of the province tended to be very congratulatory towards the Consortia in terms of the services offered; however, this was often tempered with a desire to

have more sessions offered at more remote sites rather than always in the main urban or suburban centers.

- More effective use of distance-delivery was cited as a way to address the needs of remote stakeholder groups.

6.3. Accountability

Financial

The general feedback from focus groups and stakeholders indicated a high level of satisfaction with the accountability of Consortia. The market-driven, cost-recovery model was seen as ultimately the most effective test of whether clients are being adequately served. In spite of this, there was strong support for the development of a common accountability framework for use by all Consortia, including a common set of goals and performance measures. The only caveats to this were that there should be adequate flexibility to allow the Consortia to add goals and measures related to local circumstances, and the accountability provisions should not become administratively burdensome.

The question of an appropriate level of operating reserves or uncommitted net assets for each Consortium has arisen as a result of the review of financial statements. This question will be considered more closely as discussions with the Executive Directors continue on refinements to financial reporting. Once these discussions are completed and the financial reporting reflects accurately the level of uncommitted net assets, a determination can be made on the appropriate amount of such assets to be held by each Consortium as a contingency.

There is a need for Alberta Education to consider its role as financial monitor, given the small size of the Consortia relative to the overall operation of the K-12 system. While the amounts received and spent each year by each Consortium are modest, the latitude for error in reporting is also quite small. And since a great deal of programming can be delivered at very reasonable cost, minor errors in reporting have the potential to impair the delivery or undermine the financial situation of a Consortium to a noticeable degree. It would be prudent, therefore, for the department to ensure the financial statements are reviewed in detail every year and a report prepared for each of the Consortia boards, summarizing the results for all six Consortia.

Program

As part of the improvement in accountability structures and processes, the Consortia could benefit from more consistent and standardized reporting on programs delivered and clients served. Discussions related to this are under way with the Executive Directors and new reporting practices are already being developed. Once the improved accountability framework is in place, reporting on program results should become both clearer and administratively easier than at present.

6.4. Emergent Circumstances Impacting the Review

Two significant contextual considerations emerged during the assessment of the Regional Professional Development Consortia; the 2003 School Council Review and the report of the Commission On Learning, published in October 2003.

School Council Review

The School Council Review Recommendation 2.3 identified a need for enhanced training for School Council members. The Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA) has been assigned lead partner responsibility for the provision of such training, and the Consortia were identified among the key education partners to support the implementation activity plan, as required.

Commission on Learning

The report of the Commission On Learning includes a number of goals and recommendations related to professional development². Of specific note are the following goals found on page 113 of the report:

Goals

"Alberta's teachers are well prepared for the challenges of teaching and meeting the diverse needs of their students."

"Ongoing professional development activities ensure that Alberta's teachers keep pace with the latest research and innovations and translate that into strategies that constantly improve the outcomes for their students."

Recommendations already accepted by the Minister that may have particular relevance for the Consortia are as follows:

Recommendations

- 43 Ensure that teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development activities prepare teachers to address the diversity of students, including children with special needs.
- 46 Provide appropriate training and professional development for teaching assistants who work with children with special needs.
- 54 Continue to support research and innovative approaches for improving student outcomes
- 70 Establish a permanent mechanism for ensuring a closer link among faculties of education, superintendents, teachers, and Alberta Education.
- 73 Require all teachers to have targeted annual professional development plans that are directly linked to their schools' improvement plans.
- 79 Develop a comprehensive, targeted program for preparing superintendents and providing ongoing professional development to support them in their role as CEOs of school jurisdictions.

It appears evident that the professional development goals set by the Commission and the Minister's response to the Commission's recommendations may have a significant impact on how professional development is delivered in the province. This will no doubt also affect the role of the Consortia in providing professional development.

² Source: *Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds*, Report and Recommendations, Alberta's Commission On Learning, October 2003

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on feedback received during the Consortia assessment. The recommendations are organized around the three main purposes of the assessment: to validate the purposes of the Consortia; to review the Consortia model; and to review the adequacy of accountability requirements of the Consortia.

7.1. PURPOSES OF THE CONSORTIA

Recommendation 1: The 1995 purpose statement should be updated to reflect the future directions for the Consortia identified through the consultation process. Specifically the six original purposes should be replaced with the following broad statement of purpose and six supporting Consortia goals:

PROPOSED PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC) are dedicated to promoting student learning and achievement; school improvement; and parental engagement in the educational process, through the provision of effective professional development* services, at the local, regional and provincial levels.

PROPOSED CONSORTIA GOALS

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia will:

1. **Facilitate** professional development which supports the effective implementation of:
 - The Alberta Education business plan;
 - Jurisdiction and school education plans; and
 - School Council priorities.
2. **Facilitate** professional development which supports effective implementation of curricula, including instruction, assessment and student learning outcomes.
3. **Assist** stakeholders through coordinating, brokering, and acting as a referral center to facilitate stakeholder access to professional development resources.
4. **Deliver** professional development in response to needs identified by stakeholders.
5. **Promote and support** the development of professional development leadership capacity.
6. **Provide** all stakeholders with access to professional development at a reasonable cost.

* "Professional development" is here intended to refer to knowledge and skill development for all those who work with children to promote learning and achievement, including parents.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The specification of goals for the Consortia is consistent with the accountability frameworks used by other public entities (such as school jurisdictions) in the learning system.
- The adoption of common goals will facilitate ongoing collaboration and accountability by the Consortia.
- The recommended goals reflect the input received from stakeholders during the Consortia assessment.

7.2. CONSORTIA MODEL

Recommendation 2: A commitment of infrastructure funding (i.e. the salary and administrative expenses related to office of the Executive Director) should continue to be made on an ongoing basis.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The ability of Consortia Executive Directors and Consortia Boards to engage in long term planning will be enhanced if they have an indication that infrastructure funding will continue to be provided on an ongoing basis.
- Regular program offerings would continue to be provided on a fee-for-service basis. This approach has been well received, with stakeholders generally agreeing that Consortia PD is reasonably priced.
- In addition, from time-to-time Alberta Education may provide supplemental funding to facilitate PD related to government initiatives and priorities, such as significant curriculum revisions.

Recommendation 3: Each Consortium should strive to have all key stakeholder groups represented on the Consortium Board, including the addition of a non-certificated staff representative.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Broad stakeholder representation on the Consortia Boards is seen as a current strength of the Consortia model. However, consultations with school support staff indicate that they feel under-served by the Consortia, and that communications from the Consortia do not always reach them.
- The AHSCA has a seat on each Consortium's Board; however, they have not always been able to provide a representative to serve. In those instances when the AHSCA is unable to provide a Board representative, the Consortia should attempt to have a local School Council Chair or parent serve on the Board so that parents are ensured a voice at the Consortium Board level.

Recommendation 4: Basic Learning should continue to strengthen collaboration with the Consortia to ensure effective coordination, alignment and planning of PD.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Having Basic Learning staff assigned to work directly with the Consortia to facilitate planning and coordination has been found to be an effective part of the existing operational model.
- Having zone managers serve as ex-officio members of the Consortia Boards helps strengthen the link between the Consortia, the jurisdictions and Alberta Learning.

7.3. ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Recommendation 5: The Consortia Executive Directors should continue to work with System Improvement and Reporting (SIR) and the School Improvement Branch to develop and implement a standardized accountability framework.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- The current cost-recovery model is seen as providing a high level of accountability for the Consortia. However, it is recognized that adoption of a common accountability structure would enhance planning and communication of results.
- An accountability framework consisting of a vision and mission statements, goals, outcomes, performance measures and targets is now a standard component of results reporting by public entities. Such a framework would include a number of elements consistent across the Consortia, while at the same time, allowing regional priorities to be reflected.
- The development of a standard set of metrics for reporting performance data should be an important element of a standardized accountability framework.

7.4. OTHER

Recommendation 6: The Consortia should explore the use of alternate delivery methods to meet the needs of clients in remote areas.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Consortia PD is generally offered in larger centers. Stakeholders located in remote areas of the province reported that travel costs to attend many sessions are often prohibitive.
- The development of SuperNet is making it more feasible for PD to be provided by distance delivery to remote sites through approaches such as audio and video-conferencing.

Recommendation 7: The Consortia and school authorities should collaboratively develop mechanisms that effectively communicate the availability of PD.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Feedback from parents, School Council Chairs and non-certificated staff indicated that many of them feel they are not able to access PD because they do not receive the information sent out by the Consortia. As well, they indicate that they do not have access to the financial support required to participate.
- The 2003 School Council Review identified a need for enhanced training for School Council members.

Recommendation 8: Alberta Education should continue to review Consortia annual reports based on the revised financial and program outcomes reporting standards developed in conjunction with the review.

Rationale and Clarifying Details

- With the adoption of an outcomes-based accountability structure, Consortia will be in a position to provide better quality program delivery and results information. Annual review by the department of these outcomes-based reports, with feedback to the Consortia, will

continue to strengthen each Consortium's annual reporting process and will support policy development and decision-making.

- System Improvement and Reporting and the School Improvement Branch have been working collaboratively with Consortia Executive Directors to standardize the reporting of financial information and to refine the reporting of program results based on outcomes.

Recommendation 9: This report should be shared within government and with stakeholders to enhance planning, implementation and evaluation of PD within the learning system.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- Government's review of Alberta Commission on Learning's recommendations related to PD could be usefully informed through the broad input received during the Consortium assessment.

Recommendation 10

That Alberta Learning facilitate a Professional Development working group that includes representation from the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia and other key partners providing PD services, to enhance the coordination of PD, the evaluation of PD, and the communication of the purpose and benefits of PD to education stakeholders.

Rationale and Clarifying Details:

- A number of education partners provide PD services, particularly in large urban centers, and enhanced coordination of PD will increase the ability of all PD providers to ensure that a high quality of programming is maintained and unnecessary duplication is avoided.
- One of the challenges is determining how effective PD has been for improving practice that results in improved student learning. Working collaboratively with key partners who provide PD services will increase the focus on the components of effective PD, the purposes of PD, and the evaluation of its effectiveness.
- In order to support the time allotted for PD, parents need to know and understand the benefits of effective PD for their child's learning.

8. APPENDICES

- A.1. Assessment Terms of Reference
- A.2. Survey Plan
- A.3. Financial and Participant Summary and Analysis

ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIA

TERMS OF REFERENCE

BACKGROUND

- The six regional professional development consortia were established under the *Guidelines for Establishing Regional Consortia (1995)*;
- In November 2000, the Assistant Deputy Minister met with the provincial leaders of the education partners to discuss the issue of sustainability of the Consortia.
- At that meeting, the need for an assessment of the regional consortia was identified.
- The assessment will be completed in collaboration with the education partners.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this assessment is to:

- Determine how well the regional consortia have achieved the primary purposes as outlined in the 1995 *Guidelines*;
- Determine whether the Consortia model continues to be effective, given changes which have occurred since 1995;
- Make recommendations relative to the future role of the Consortia to support the professional development needs of the education community in all regions of the province in both official languages; and
- Ensure that the accountability process for the Consortia meets the needs of all stakeholders and is consistent with the proposed future role of the Consortia.

STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW

A. Project Sponsors

The Project Sponsors are:

- The Assistant Deputy Minister of Basic Learning; and
- The Assistant Deputy Minister of System Improvement and Reporting.

The sponsors shall:

- Approve the project Terms of Reference, Workplan and budget;
- Provide financial and other resources as required for completion of the assessment; and
- Be the recipients of the Interim and Final Reports.

B. Working Committee

The Working Committee shall be composed of:

- Executive Director, Field Services (Niki Wosnack);
- Director, School Improvement Branch (Dianna Millard); and
- Senior Managers from System Improvement and Reporting (Bill Spaans and Peter Malcolm).

The Working Committee shall:

- Draft and develop the assessment Terms of Reference, Workplan and budget as well as provide advice to the Project Sponsors;
- Receive interim progress reports and provide direction as needed; and
- Review and revise, as appropriate, the final report before forwarding it to the project Sponsors.
- Provide copies of the final report to the Advisory Committee for distribution to stakeholder organizations.

C. Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee shall be composed of:

- A representative of each of the stakeholders, as identified in the 1995 “Guidelines for Establishing Regional Consortia”, namely the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta Teachers’ Association, Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Home and School Councils’ Association, Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, Alberta Universities and Colleges, and possibly Business and Community Organizations. These members should ideally be selected to provide regional representation.
- A representative from the Alberta Regional Consortia.
- Alberta Education representatives from each of the following: Field Services Sector, School Improvement Branch (chair); Provincial Standards and Processes Sector, Teacher Development and Certification Branch and System Improvement and Reporting.

The Advisory Committee shall be charged with:

- Providing input to the Draft Terms of Reference and Workplan;
- Acting in an advisory capacity to the Working Committee;
- Providing feedback on the draft Interim Report for consideration by the Working Committee, prior to submission to the project sponsors;
- Providing feedback on the draft Final Report for consideration by the Working Committee, prior to submission to the project sponsors.
- Providing input into the assessment methodology and instruments.
- The responsibility for keeping the organization they represent informed.

The Advisory Committee shall be chaired by the Director, School Improvement Branch, Field Services Sector, who will:

- Arrange all Advisory Committee meeting dates and times in consultation with the Researcher;

- Prepare agenda and meeting minutes.

D. Researchers

The Researchers shall be senior managers from System Improvement and Reporting Division. The Researchers, in consultation with the Working Committee, shall:

- Develop appropriate assessment processes and instruments consistent with the approved Terms of Reference and Workplan;
- Conduct the assessment;
- Ensure all Workplan outputs are met in a timely manner; and
- Prepare an Interim Report and a Draft Final Report for review by the Advisory Committee, and submission to the Project Sponsors, including recommendations consistent with the overall purposes of the assessment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The project will involve two primary phases:

Phase One:

Examine existing Consortia assessment/ evaluation processes:

- Conduct an analysis of the congruence between current Consortia vision, mission, goal statements and workplan and the Consortia purpose statement found in the Guidelines.
- Develop a summary of current performance measures used by the Consortia to substantiate results and identify possible gaps in these measures.
- Develop a summary of findings and interim recommendations for consideration by the Project Sponsors.

Phase Two:

- Gather data by survey and other means from stakeholders and clients about the current and future efficacy of the Consortia
- Develop recommendations relative to the current and future role of the Consortia.
- Develop an accountability process that meets the needs of all stakeholders and is consistent with the recommended role.
- Prepare an annotated synopsis of literature on effective professional development models and practices

DELIVERABLES

Phase One:

An interim report will be provided to the Project Sponsors by May 1, 2003 outlining:

- A summary of the current goals, activities and achievements of the Consortia, based on information they collect about their services; and
- A recommended process for Phase Two of the project.

Phase Two:

A Final Assessment Report and literature synopsis shall be provided to the Project Sponsors by December 22, 2003.

WORKPLAN

Timing	Activity	Lead
May 2002	• Develop draft Terms of Reference and Workplan • Prepare Charter Agreement between System Improvement and Reporting Branch and Basic Learning for signature by the respective ADM's	SIR & PD&C
June 10/02	• Meeting with Consortia Regional Directors to review draft Terms of Reference and Workplan • Establish Advisory Committee	SIR & PD&C
Feb. 7/03	• Meeting with the Advisory Committee to review the assessment draft Terms of Reference and Workplan	Director, School Improvement Branch
April 18/03	• Complete Phase 1 assessment • Draft Interim Report provided to Advisory Committee members	SIR
May 2/03	• Meeting with Advisory Committee to review progress, review the interim report for Phase 1, and plan for Phase 2	SIR & Field Services
May 22/03	• Submit the Interim Report to the project sponsors	Working Committee
Sept. 19/03	• Meeting with Advisory Committee to review survey results and focus group instruments	SIR & Field Services
Nov. 20/03	• Complete assessment • Develop draft Final Report and recommendations	SIR
December 8/03	• Meeting with Advisory Committee to review the draft Final Report	SIR & Field Services
Dec. 22/03	• Submit Final Report to the project sponsors	Working Committee

ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIA

SURVEY PLAN

Surveys are designed to “gather primary data directly from individuals about their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.”¹ It is proposed that the following surveys be administered to gather such data from Regional Professional Development Consortia clients and other stakeholders for use in the Consortium assessments:

Survey Type	Participants	Purpose	Methodology
Questionnaire & Focus Group - Trustees	Trustees	- Collect input on current consortia mandate and operations via a questionnaire developed by ASBA - Use a focus group to obtain qualitative input on the future role of consortia	- A paper-based questionnaire has been developed and circulated to Trustees by ASBA - Responses will be compiled and used as the basis for a focus group discussion, to be facilitated by Alberta Education, at the June general meeting of ASBA - ASBA Board of Directors will develop a formal response based on survey responses and the focus group discussions.
Questionnaire – School-based clients and stakeholders	- Teachers - Support staff (non-certificated) - School administrators (vice-principals, assistant principals) - School Council Chairs	Collect input on: - Consortia communication of professional development opportunities - Participation by the various sub-groups in professional development offered by the consortia - The efficacy of professional development offered by the consortia - Overall assessment of services provided by the consortia	- Schools in each consortia region will be surveyed in September & October 2003 - Questionnaires will be forwarded electronically to the superintendent, with the request that these be forwarded to the principal in each school in the district - The principal will be requested to forward the staff questionnaires electronically to staff in the school wherever possible. In the case of some support staff, paper copies of the questionnaire may need to be provided - The principal will be asked to forward the School Council questionnaire electronically to the Chair of the School Council where possible. Alternatively a paper copy should be forwarded in the event that the School Council Chair does not have electronic access - Completed questionnaires are to be returned to Alberta Education for compilation and analysis - All questionnaires will be coded for tracking purposes; however, returns will be treated as confidential. Only aggregated findings will be reported.

¹ “Alberta Learning Survey Research Policy, Guidelines and Best Practices” October 2002, page 1

Survey Type	Participants	Purpose	Methodology
Questionnaire – School and Jurisdiction Administrators	- Principals - Superintendents, or designate	Collect input as per the questionnaire for school-based clients/stakeholders, <u>plus</u>: - Feedback on whether the consortium has fulfilled the purposes as set out in the 1995 “Guidelines for Establishment of Regional Consortia” - Feedback on whether the purposes of consortia as set out in the 1995 Guidelines are still relevant given current professional development needs and emerging circumstances - Suggestions for revisions to the role of consortia to address current professional development needs and emerging circumstance	Principals - An on-line questionnaire will be sent to all superintendents in the first week of June, with the request that they forward these to all principals in their district - Completed questionnaires will be sent back to Alberta Education and adjustments will be made to the questionnaire format, based on an analysis of responses. - The on-line questionnaire will be sent to superintendents a second time in September, with a request that it be forwarded to principals so that non-respondents to the first issuance of the survey have an opportunity to respond. - Alberta Education will compile results and conduct analysis of survey responses in October/ November 2003 Superintendents - CASS members will be informed of the survey at the May and June Zone meetings - An on-line questionnaire will be sent to all superintendents in the first week of June 2003 - Completed questionnaires will be sent back to Alberta Education and adjustments will be made to the questionnaire format, based on an analysis of responses. - The on-line questionnaire will be sent to superintendents a second time in September so that non-respondents to the first issuance of the survey have an opportunity to respond. - Alberta Education will compile results and conduct analysis during October/ November 2003.
Focus Group	- Principals - Parents - Jurisdiction admin - Teachers - Teacher Assistants - Other Support Staff	- To obtain qualitative feedback on: - The purpose/ mandate of the consortia - Accountability - Future role - To explore in-depth some of the key findings from questionnaire responses	- Focus groups, facilitated by Alberta Education, will be conducted in each of the six regions, in November 2003, for the following groups: - Certificated staff (jurisdiction administration, principals and teachers); - Parents; - Non-certificated staff - An additional focus group will be conducted in Northlands School Division, in recognition of the uniqueness of the region it serves. - A separate focus group will be conducted, with representatives from a francophone school authority.

Additional Information Gathering (added on the suggestion of the Advisory Committee, September 19, 2003)

Stakeholder groups and organizations* will be invited to provide input into the project, using the following process:

1. Starter questions will be provided to all groups and organizations, modeled on the four questions** asked by ASBA of trustees attending their Spring general meeting in May 2003.
2. Stakeholder groups and organizations will solicit feedback primarily from those individuals who are currently a member of, or have previously served on, the boards of the regional consortia.
3. The provision of this input will be voluntary and each group or organization will be free to decide whether to provide it, depending on the extent to which it considers its perspectives and opinions to be adequately represented through the survey or other processes already in place as part of the project.
4. Groups and organizations are free to determine the most effective process by which this input will be gathered.
5. The target date for completing the process and submitting the feedback to the Advisory Committee (through the Alberta Education Working Group) is October 31, 2003. Consideration will be given to accommodating later submission, on a case-by-case basis.

* Alberta Home and School Councils Association (AHSCA); Alberta Regional Consortia Executive Directors; Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA); Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA); College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS); University Faculties of Education. NOTE: The Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) has already prepared a response for submission to the Advisory Committee, hence their apparent omission from the list.

** ASBA Survey Questions

1. In serving your Board, has the Consortium in your area met the goals established for it in 1995?
2. Should the current Consortia model be retained?
3. Does your Board wish to make recommendations relative to the future role of the Consortia?
4. Would your Board want to enhance the accountability process for the Consortia?

Financial and Participation Summary

Official financial reports to Alberta Education and program participation data included in the consortia annual reports provide descriptive information on the level of participation as well as a useful summary of revenues and expenses. However, a number of modest (and acceptable) variations between consortia (within and across fiscal years) in the presentation of financial information, as well as differences in the methods of counting programs and participant numbers, render it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the cost-effectiveness of consortia, either individually or collectively. Interpretation of differences between years should be done cautiously, as there is some inconsistency in reporting practices between consortia and between fiscal years in the reporting of items within the revenue and expense sub-categories.

Given these limitations, the following presentation must be considered illustrative of the type of analysis that could be done if data of the necessary consistency were available.

Summary of 2002-03 and 2001-02 Actual Revenues and Expenses – All Consortia

Revenues	2002/03	2001/02
Alberta Education Establishment and Maintenance Grants	\$ 959,448	\$ 959,448
Other Alberta Government Sources (conditional grants)	345,755	346,175
From Other Sources (including registration fees)	<u>1,158,571</u>	<u>1,007,301</u>
Total Revenues (excluding transfers from accumulated surpluses/reserves ¹)	2,463,774	2,312,924
Expenses		
Salaries, Wages, Benefits	\$ 704,173	\$ 530,129
Services, Contracts, Supplies ²	1,907,270	1,670,738
Board Expenses (including travel and subsistence)	<u>18,487</u>	<u>11,357</u>
Total Expenditures	2,629,930	2,213,620
Revenues minus Expenses (before transfers from surpluses/reserves)	(\$166,156)	\$ 99,304
Revenues minus Expenses (after transfers from surpluses/reserves)	\$ 65,929	\$ 215,285

Analysis

Total Number of Programs/Sessions (from annual reports)	511	594
Total Revenues (before unbudgeted transfers) per Program/Session	\$ 4,821	\$ 3,894
Total Expenditures per Program/Session	\$ 5,147	\$ 3,727
Imputed per program/session excess/(deficiency) of revenue less expense	\$(1,424)	\$ 167
Total Number of Participants (from annual reports)	16,961	³14,613
Total Revenues (before unbudgeted transfers) per Participant ⁴	\$ 145	\$ 158
Total Expenditures per Participant	\$ 155	\$ 151
Imputed per participant excess/(deficiency) of revenue less expense	\$ (10)	\$ 7
Average Number of Participants per Program/Session	33	25

¹ Consortia may carry a surplus from year to year to provide for unanticipated fluctuations in revenue and expense flows. This is prudent business practice, given the consortia's mandate to operate on a cost-recovery basis. The presentation has been standardized and may not reflect the way a consortium reported its accumulated surplus/ reserve.

² Includes all office supplies, communications, administrative and non-program contract expenses, as well as the direct costs of providing PD programs.

³ Includes an estimate from one consortium. The actual number may be either higher or lower by a modest amount.

⁴ Revenues per participant do not reflect what participants actually pay in registration fees.

Summary of 2002-03 Actual Revenues and Expenses by Consortium

This summary is intended only to provide information on the revenues and expenses of each consortium and is presented in this format for the convenience of the reader. It should not be used to compare the relative financial performance of each consortium with the others.

	Totals	Northwest RLC	Edmonton RC	East Central RC	Central Alberta RC	Calgary RC	Sthn Alberta RPDC
	2002/03	2002/03	2002/03	2002/03	2002/03	2002/03	2002/03
Revenues							
Government - regular	959,448	159,908	159,908	159,908	159,908	159,908	159,908
Governmentt - other	345,755		232,155	25,000	5,000	46,500	37,100
Total Government	1,305,203	159,908	392,063	184,908	164,908	206,408	197,008
Other	1,158,571	204,582	303,033	112,320	89,483	233,211	215,942
Total Revenues before Transfers from Acc. Surplus	2,463,774	364,490	695,096	297,228	254,391	439,619	412,950
Funds Transferred from Accumulated Operating Surplus	232,085		82,516	30,673	55,133	63,763	
Total Revenues after Transfers from Acc. Surplus	2,695,859	364,490	777,612	327,901	309,524	603,382	412,950
Expenses							
Salaries, Wages, Benefits	704,173	121,593	184,089	130,138	65,363	74,051	128,939
Services, Contracts, Supplies	1,907,270	236,227	592,235	196,592	238,465	426,641	217,110
Board - Travel & Subsistence	14,659	3,200	1,288	1,171	5,126	2,690	1,184
Board - Other	3,828	1,995	-	-	570	-	1,263
Total	2,629,930	363,015	777,612	327,901	309,524	503,382	348,496
Revenue less Expenses	65,929	1,475	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	64,454
Surplus / Reserves at Beginning of Year ²	1,198,758	96,732	396,050	107,899	210,267	203,927	183,883
Surplus / Reserves at Year-End	1,032,602	98,207	313,534	77,226	155,134	140,164	248,337

² The surplus/reserves amounts for Central Alberta and Southern Alberta are somewhat overstated because they contain a portion of unspent Alberta Education conditional grant funding from prior years. The numbers reported for these consortia have not be adjusted, as the amounts are modest and restatement would require administrative effort that could more effectively be spent in completing the work of implementing the planned accountability framework.